

TO: CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISORS AND EMPLOYEES

FROM: Tiffany Arp

DATE: January 14, 2011

RE: 2011 ARBOR DAY ESSAY CONTEST

2011 marks the 34<sup>rd</sup> year of the Arbor Day Essay Contest open to all 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students from South Dakota. It will have been 139 years ago, in 1872 that J. Sterling Morton and the State of Nebraska sponsored and hosted the first ever Arbor Day. Over one million trees were estimated to have been planted in Nebraska on that day.

### **Prizes**

In 2010, we received 1,811 entries from 36 conservation districts. This was up from the previous year in the number of essays submitted, and remained steady for number of Conservation Districts involved. In 2009, we received 1,668 entries from 36 districts.

First Place: \$100 cash award and \$150 to the winner's school

Second Place: \$75 cash award

Third Place: \$50 cash award

The first place state winner will receive a very attractive, lined jacket from McDonald's. The State Association of Conservation Districts has agreed to arrange for each of the three state winners to receive an engraved plaque. Each student who enters the contest will receive a certificate for a free dessert item from McDonald's, and a packet of honey locust tree seeds and instructions on how to grow his/her own tree, courtesy of the Keep South Dakota Green Association. Finally, I am attaching the certificates of achievement available for local district winners. It is a Microsoft Word document, all you need to do is type in the student's name with any font you choose and print if off; preferably on nice paper.

### **Seed Packets and Dessert Cards**

As the same as last year I am going to have you request the seed packets and dessert cards directly from me. I would like you to request the prizes via email directly to me. Let me know the number of entries you had and I will send all the materials to you so you can make up your own packets. I hope this will eliminate some of the confusion as to who got what and how many from last year. In the email inform me if you intend to give packets to the teachers.

Last year in some districts the number of seed and dessert packet requests were higher than the number of essays participant numbers submitted to Angela. If you need more packets than you have essays participants, tell me in your request as to why you need more packets. McDonalds donates those dessert cards to us every year and we should not be abusing their generosity.

### **Rules**

The central theme of essays should be the importance of Arbor Day and trees. Students should concentrate on why we celebrate Arbor Day in South Dakota and why it is important to plant and care for trees across the state. They are encouraged to focus on personal experience, and to remember that originality and effectiveness are major factors in judging.

The 2011 rules sheet is available on the division website at: [sdds.sd.gov/Forestry/educational-information/environmental-poster](http://sdds.sd.gov/Forestry/educational-information/environmental-poster). **Note: There is a place to stamp or type in the name and address of your district on the flyer.** Please promote the contest as best you can, especially by contacting elementary schools in your district.

If possible, deliver the contest rules in person. Then you can help explain the contest to school officials and answer questions. You should understand that school systems are bombarded with essay and poster contests and, as a result, can be indifferent to such projects. But the fact that each student who enters will receive a McDonald's certificate and a packet of tree seeds to grow his/her own tree, and that local recognition of the school and student winners will be arranged, should help sell the program.

Please encourage teachers not to alter essays in any way; obviously corrected or edited essays cannot be considered. Grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors should not be corrected by teachers or others at the local level. Typing is not required. A prize at the local level is optional, but encouraged. We suggest that it should not exceed \$25 in value; it would have to come from a local source.

A statewide news release will be issued shortly to announce the contest. A copy of the release is attached for your information and use. Please feel free to alter and personalize the release to fit your needs, and to hand deliver copies to the local news media.

### **Deadlines and Judging**

Each conservation district should select a local winner and if you like, honorable mentions. We are recommending a deadline for the schools to get their essays to you, of March 18, 2011 in order to get your winning essay to Angela. Submit only the local first place winner with completed cover page for judging at the state level. The attached point scoring system, part of the Contest Rules, can be used as a more objective and uniform method of scoring essays. **Fax your local winning essay to SDACD Executive Secretary, Angela Ehlers, at 605-895-9424 by April 1, 2011.**

The panel of state contest judges includes representatives of SDACD, the Resource Conservation and Forestry Division and persons to be selected. The judges will select the first, second, and third place winners shortly after the April 1, 2011 deadline, and will immediately notify the conservation districts that sponsored the three winners. Well in advance of local awards presentations, contact your local RC&F office or the Pierre office to request certificates and tree seed cards. Be sure to indicate how many of each you will need. You might invite your local service forester to assist with the presentation of awards on or around Arbor Day which falls on April 29, 2010.

When submitting your local entries to the state contest, **please use the attached cover sheet and indicate the name of the student's teacher and how many total entries were received by your district.** This gives us an accurate figure on the grand total number of entries received which is very important for publicity purposes as the question always comes up.

The final aspect of the project is to distribute the seed packets to all students who enter the contest. This can be handled in several ways. You could visit each classroom and give a talk on the importance of planting and caring for trees and then pass out the packets and present any awards. Another option would be to arrange a school assembly for the elementary school fifth and sixth graders. You could also present the packets to the schools and allow teachers to distribute them. The latter takes less time, but is less personal and less effective. If you need assistance with speaking in the classroom please contact myself or one of our area service foresters.

You might be interested to know that, as in past years, the RC&F Division is working with the 2010 "Arbor Day Poster Contest". That contest has been announced. It is open to fifth grade students only. The deadline for entries is March 25, 2011, and the theme is "Trees are Terrific . . . in All Shapes and Sizes!" Curriculum packets have been posted on the division webpage and letters mailed to you and to fifth grade teachers. This is the second year the poster contest is distributed completely digitally.

If you have any questions or concerns, please give me a call at 605-773-3594 or toll free using the Department of Agriculture Hotline: 1-800-228-5254, or Angela Ehlers at the SDACD office in Pierre at 1-800-729-4099

cc: Angela Ehlers, SDACD Executive Secretary